



Catherine E. Pugh
Mayor

COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

Tom Liebel, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director, Planning

February 13, 2018

REQUEST: Approval of Subdivision Plan including Concept Approval of Height, Massing and Scale of 14 Houses

ADDRESS: Various Addresses along Hill Street/Freeman's Oval in Franklinton, Baltimore

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Walter W. Gallas, AICP

APPLICANT: Al Barry, AB Associates

OWNER: Linda Eberhart

SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT

The property is located within the Franklinton local historic district in the heart of the district (*Image 1*). Franklinton represents several periods, styles, and types of architecture and landscape architecture embodied by William Freeman's 1832 suburban plan for Franklinton and Freeman's Oval; mill buildings that illustrate its industrial heritage; and a range of housing that illustrates architectural styles from the late 19th and early 20th century. It retains rural and village characteristics within Baltimore's city limits. Franklinton has been a local historic district since 1998.

Site Conditions/Architectural Description: The site, Freemans' Oval, contains a number of early buildings dating to the mid-19th century. 1711 and 1721 N. Forest Park Avenue are oriented with their backs to Hill Street. They are built in the I-form style, with steeply pitched roofs and central cross gables. A barn, located next to 1721, has a deep stone foundation which reflects other uses in the past such as an ice house and butcher's operation and has been under rehabilitation for several years. A simple house built in the 1950s is squeezed behind the barn and between the two 19th century houses (*Images 2-5*). Other houses along the south side of Hill Street date to the 1930s and are in the bungalow style, with likely the latest house, determined to be a non-contributing building dating to 1960, at 1715 Hill Street located on the east side of the central wooded park land (*Images 6 & 7*).

Hill Street, which would have been the inner ring of a double-ringed plan shaped like a race course, today is essentially a U shape, with its northern half never realized (*Image 8*). Hill Street starts at Rose Lane on the west side of the central green space and curves south and then east and north to end just past 1715 Hill Street (*Image 9*). Crescent Street, the envisioned outer ring of the plan, is even less defined. N. Forest Park Avenue replaced some of Crescent Street

on the southwest side of the oval plan, and only a small section is still evident at the southeast corner (*Image 10*). The open area at the center of the oval has also been called Washington Park or Horn's Park. It retains a mature stand of trees, many of them oaks (*Image 11*). Some records indicate that during the Civil War, Union troops camped in the oak grove.

BACKGROUND

October 22, 2007—CHAP approved in concept a much larger site plan for the development of housing that included not only land on the Hill Street Oval, but also development along Crescent Street, North Forest Park Avenue, and Franklinton Road. Along the Hill Street Oval, the plan was for the construction of 8 two-story single family detached and semi-detached houses with two-car garages and the restoration or rehabilitation of five historic houses into single-family residences and condominiums. The plan was not carried out.¹

September 12, 2017—CHAP approved in concept the subdivision of the property for the creation of up to 12 building lots. CHAP also determined that 1715 Hill Street is not a contributing building in the Franklinton historic district.

PROPOSAL & APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES

The applicant is proposing a subdivision plan for the construction of 14 new semi-detached houses on the Hill Street Oval (*Image 12*). Since the time that the Commission approved the subdivision plan for up to 12 new houses, an additional piece of property along Hill Street has been acquired; therefore, the current plan proposes 14 new houses. Eight of the houses would be along Hill Street. Six of the houses would be constructed across the northern side of the wooded park, with the lots generally in alignment—on an east- west axis—with Rose Lane. The portion of Hill Street to the east side of the oval would be extended beyond its current point to the side of the new houses within the oval. A pedestrian walkway would be constructed on the northern side of the center six houses to complete the oval shape of Hill Street. A pathway would be constructed across the oval on the east-west axis aligning with Rose Lane.

Staff applied the following sections of the *Baltimore City Historic Preservation Design Guidelines* in reviewing this proposal:

2.1 Guiding Principles for New Design

2.2 Site Design

2.3 Scale and Form

2.4.1 Building Entrances

2.4.5 Roofs

4.2.3 Streets, Alleys, and Parking

4.2.5 Sidewalks and Walkways

4.2.8 Trees and Other Plantings

¹ The overall plan included the construction of 23 new single family detached and semi-detached houses, 28 new multi-family townhouses and condo units, and the rehabilitation/restoration of 7 existing historic properties.

2.1 Guiding Principles for New Design

- Avoid demolishing historic buildings, structures, and landscapes when designing new construction projects.
- Identify the character-defining features of the surrounding historic buildings and streetscape. Design new buildings to visually relate to the historic environment. Respect the established design precedent in the immediate area.
- Contemporary architectural design that reflects its current time, place, use, and culture is accepted, provided that the design is compatible with the character of the historic district.
- Radically contrasting building designs are discouraged within local historic districts.
- New buildings that are similar to existing buildings in materials, form, massing, and architectural features are accepted as long as the new buildings can be distinguished from historic buildings.

Application of Guidelines

CHAP determined at the September 2017 hearing that one of the buildings in the plan's footprint did not contribute to the historic district and therefore could be demolished. No historic buildings will be demolished. The landscape is an important feature of this plan. The concept of an oval of housing surrounding a wooded park dates to William Freeman's plan of 1832 (*Image 13*). While Freeman's concept was never fully realized, this 21st century plan gives a nod to the 19th century plan by extending Hill Street a bit more, and by completing the oval—for the first time—by adding a pedestrian walkway to the inner ring. The construction of houses bisecting the oval as is being proposed here, may not have been in the historic plan, yet as CHAP staff pointed out in the September 12, 2017, report: "This is the section that never seemed to have realized any part of Freeman's plan, and therefore development of the section as envisioned by the site plan destroys nothing and would be appropriate."² The simple design vocabulary for the proposed new construction takes its cues from two nearby mid-19th century houses at the western side of the Hill Street Oval, 1711 and 1721 N. Forest Park Avenue. The historic houses—with wood clapboards, stone at the first floors, steeply pitched roofs and broad front porches—have a rural feel. The proposed new houses adopt these design elements, but can clearly be distinguished from the historic houses (*Images 14 & 15*).

2.2 Site Design

- Retain established property line patterns, street and alley widths, setbacks, primary and secondary building orientation, and landscape elements.
- Incorporate character-defining site design features of the historic district into the designs of new construction projects.
- In areas with varied setbacks, the setback for new construction should be within ten percent (10%) of those of neighboring buildings. Variations to these setback guidelines may be warranted in some cases, but decisions should be carefully considered with respect to their impact on the overall streetscape.

² CHAP Staff Report, Various Addresses along Hill Street/Freeman's Oval in Franklinton, Baltimore, September 12, 2017, p. 3.

- The spaces between buildings help define the historic character of the neighborhood. Design new construction to follow the existing pattern of building widths and spacing between buildings.
- Primary buildings should have a similar orientation and relationship to the street as the existing buildings. Primary entrances and facades should be located, oriented, and sequenced to be consistent with the pattern of entrances and facades in the neighborhood.
- New construction projects should reinforce existing patterns of open space and enclosure created by existing vehicular and pedestrian circulation routes, fences, walls, yards, courtyards, gardens, and landscaping.
- New construction at corners or abutting public spaces require special consideration in the design of entrances and multiple, publicly visible facades.

Application of Guidelines

CHAP staff observed in the September 12, 2017, report on this project that “...a character-defining feature of this district is its somewhat random pattern of building which responds chiefly to the terrain, and which fits into the landscape rather than responding to a street pattern.”³ The vast majority of houses near the Hill Street Oval turn their backs to it. This plan at least tries to bring some order to the neighborhood, aligning the houses along Hill Street and across the oval. There are no garages. The use of stone walls to screen the parking and to mark the entries to the new pedestrian walkways reflects a historic building material in Franklinton.

2.3 Scale and Form

- The scale and form of new buildings must be compatible with the height and depth of surrounding buildings. Where there is variation of building height within the immediate neighborhood, the new building should generally relate to the predominant pattern.
- New buildings must complement the massing of surrounding buildings, including the proportion of solid surfaces (walls) to voids (window and door openings). Respect the characteristic rhythm (fenestration, bays, rooflines, etc.) of existing buildings.
- Design the new building to be proportional to surrounding buildings. Consider important building proportions such as floor-to-floor heights, the size and placement of windows and doors, the scale of articulated elements such as porches, overhanging cornices, and bay windows.
- Floor-to-floor heights in new construction should be within ten percent (10%) of the floor-to-floor heights of adjacent historic buildings.
- Design rooflines to be compatible with those found on surrounding buildings.

Application of Guidelines

The proposed design of the buildings complements the massing of the nearby buildings. The design takes some cues from the mid-19th century houses on the west side of the oval. The pattern of windows and doors is appropriate. The rooflines respect those of existing buildings. The height to the ridgeline of each house is about 28’-0”.

³ Ibid., p. 2.

2.4.1 Building Entrances

- Design building entrances to enhance the connection between the street and the building interior.
- Respect the existing pattern of building entrances when locating new entrances.
- Design new porches and stoops that are compatible with the form, scale, and detailing of these features on surrounding buildings.

Application of Guidelines

The front entrances for the eight houses located outside of the oval along Hill Street on the east and west sides are easy to identify. These houses face Hill Street; one enters the house from the parking court. The front entrances of the six units proposed to bisect the oval are harder to identify. The houses have three possible entrances—one from the Commons, one from the side, and one from the deck adjacent to the parking pad, which is on the side of the house away from the Commons. Which is the front door? The side entrance with a small porch seems to be extraneous, since there is an entrance off of the large porch facing the Commons into the living/dining room.

2.4.5 Roofs

- Design new roofs to complement the orientation, pitch, complexity, and scale of roofs on surrounding buildings.

Application of Guidelines

The proposed roofs meet the design guidelines, complementing the pitch and scale of roofs on surrounding buildings.

4.2.3 Streets, Alleys, and Parking

- Retain historic street and alley alignments, widths, and configurations.
- Design new parking areas to be as unobtrusive as possible. In general, locate parking areas behind buildings, with access from alleys or secondary streets rather than from a principal street.
- Screen new, visible parking areas with shrub plantings, walls, or fences three to four feet high. This will mitigate the intrusion on the view while still providing security.
- Do not remove historic fabric to install a parking pad.
- Do not add a driveway where there is no historic precedent.
- Avoid the removal of mature trees when installing a new driveway or parking pad.
- Utilize pervious paving surfaces whenever possible to minimize the visual impact and prevent runoff.

Application of Guidelines

The property plat map shows a 30' right-of way for Hill Street. This plan will incorporate this dimension for the improvements to the existing street and for its extension, thus essentially retaining a historic street alignment. Because the terrain falls away from Hill Street for four of the semi-detached houses (one duplex on the west side near Rose Lane and three duplexes on the east side of Hill Street), placing parking behind the buildings would be a design and engineering challenge. Instead, the plan proposes "parking courts" in front of the houses. The parking court is inconsistent with historic district design

guidelines and would also require a zoning variance for parking in front of the buildings. It is a design solution that addresses the topography, however, and it also mirrors the existing pattern of houses turning their backs to the oval and residents pulling off of Hill Street for parking. The parking for the new houses along Hill Street would be screened from the street by 3'-6" high stone walls, which is consistent with the guidelines. Final design review will ensure that paving is with pervious surfaces as much as possible, and will minimally disturb the historic landscape.

4.2.5 Sidewalks and Walkways

- The addition of sidewalks and walkways within a historic district may be desirable to enhance pedestrian access and safety. New sidewalks and walkways should be compatible with the existing pedestrian circulation patterns.

Application of Guidelines

The new plan proposes to construct a pedestrian walkway that would complete the inner oval for the first time since the oval was conceived by William Freeman in the early 19th century. It is an amenity for the neighborhood which finally takes advantage of the rural wooded character of the site. Another pathway would be constructed across the oval on the east-west axis aligning with the Rose Lane, providing additional pedestrian circulation and creating access to the houses built on the interior of the oval facing the commons. Sidewalks are also planned for the existing sections of Hill Street and its extension.

4.2.8 Trees and Other Plantings

- Preserve, protect, and maintain healthy trees in yards and along streetscapes.

Application of Guidelines

An inventory of the trees on the property was commissioned in March 2017 (*Image 16*). Arborist Randy Bernstein assessed the size and condition of the trees. The majority of the mature and health trees appear to be at the south end of the park land, the area intended to be preserved as a commons—which would meet the guidelines. The developer will need to submit a Forest Stand Delineation as part of the City Planning approval process.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS

The Franklinton Architectural Review Committee and the neighborhood residents have been notified of this application and have met with the applicant and architect. CHAP awaits comments.

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The applicant is proposing a subdivision plan for the construction of 14 new semi-detached houses on the Hill Street Oval. Since the time that the Commission approved the subdivision plan for up to 12 new houses, an additional piece of property along Hill Street has been acquired; therefore, the current plan proposes 14 new houses. The portion of Hill Street to the east side of the oval would be extended beyond its current point to the side of the six new houses within the oval. A pedestrian walkway would be constructed to complete the oval shape of Hill Street. Another pathway would be constructed across the oval on the east-west axis aligning with Rose Lane. The plan generally meets the design guidelines for new construction, site design, scale and form, roofs, sidewalks and walkways, and trees and other plantings.

Although the plan does not meet the design guidelines for parking by placing parking in the front for eight of the 14 residences, this design decision is the product of the topography—and the parking is screened (as per the guidelines) with a 3’-6” high stone walls. Finally, CHAP defers to City Planning regarding the identification, treatment and mitigation for the trees within the proposed plan; however, based on the March 2017 tree inventory presented by the applicant, CHAP staff believes the plan meets the design guidelines for trees.

RECOMMENDATION

CHAP staff recommends approval of the subdivision plan which includes approximate width of streets, size of parking areas, location of houses and pathways. In addition staff recommends approval of height, massing and scale of 14 houses.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. L. Holcomb".

Eric Holcomb
Director

MAP AND IMAGES



Image 1– Hill Street/Freeman's Oval in the Franklinton Historic District (bright yellow outline)



Image 2: 1711 N. Forest Park Avenue, June 20, 2017



Image 3: 1721 N. Forest Park Avenue



Image 4: 1719 (left) and rear of 1721 N. Forest Park Avenue (right) from Hill Street, June 20, 2017



Image 5: 1717 N. Forest Park Avenue, September 1, 2017



Image 6: 5126 Crescent Street, June 20, 2017



Image 7: 1715 Hill Street—non-contributing building, September 1, 2017

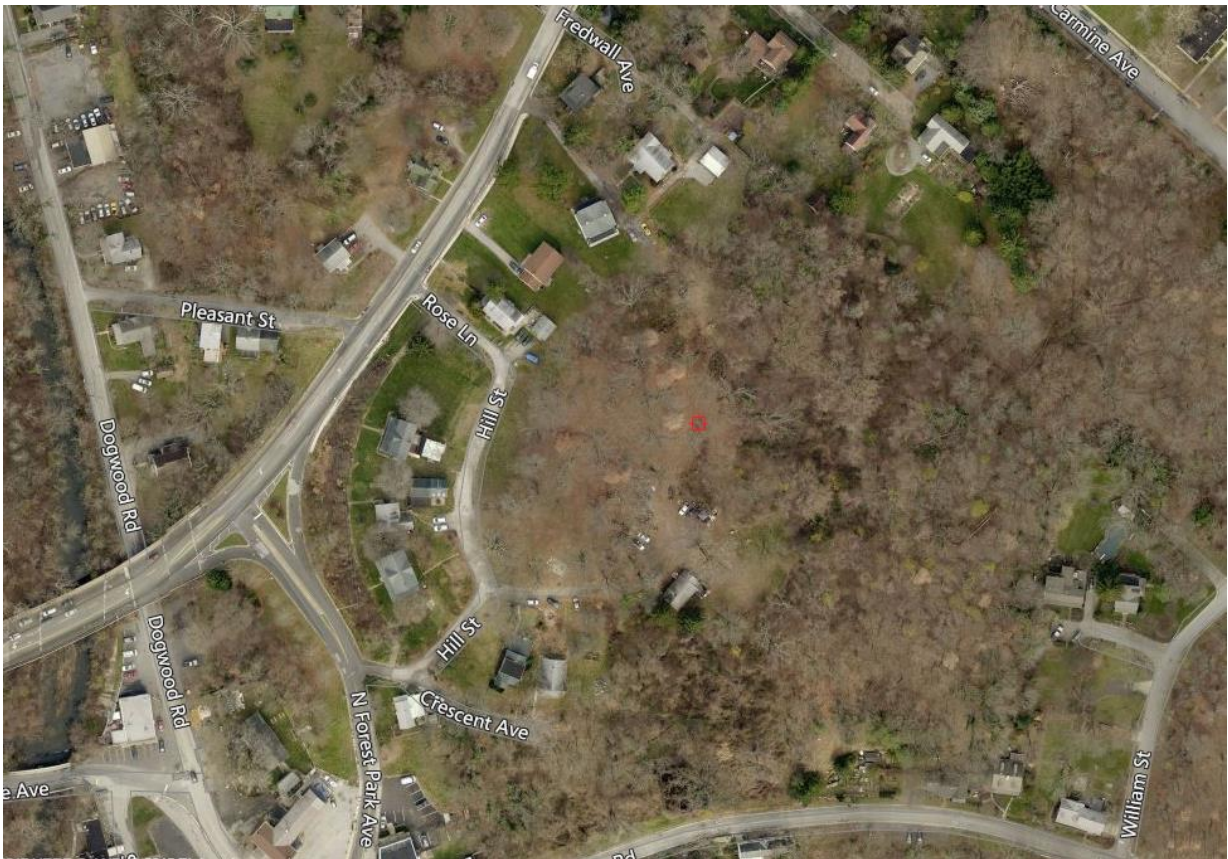


Image 8 – View of Hill Street Oval from directly above, December 2016



Image 9: End of Hill Street (inner ring of Oval Plan), June 20, 2017



Image 10: End of Crescent Street (outer ring of Oval plan), June 20, 2017



Image 11: Looking into center of Oval to Commons/Washington Park/Horn's Park, June 20, 2017



Image 12: Proposed "Franklinton Commons" Site Plan, January 19, 2018



Image 14: Housing Type A/Parking Court Elevation – for 6 semi-detached houses on east side of oval; and 2 semi-detached houses at Hill Street and Rose Lane



Image 15: Housing Type B/South Elevation—for 6 semi-detached houses across oval

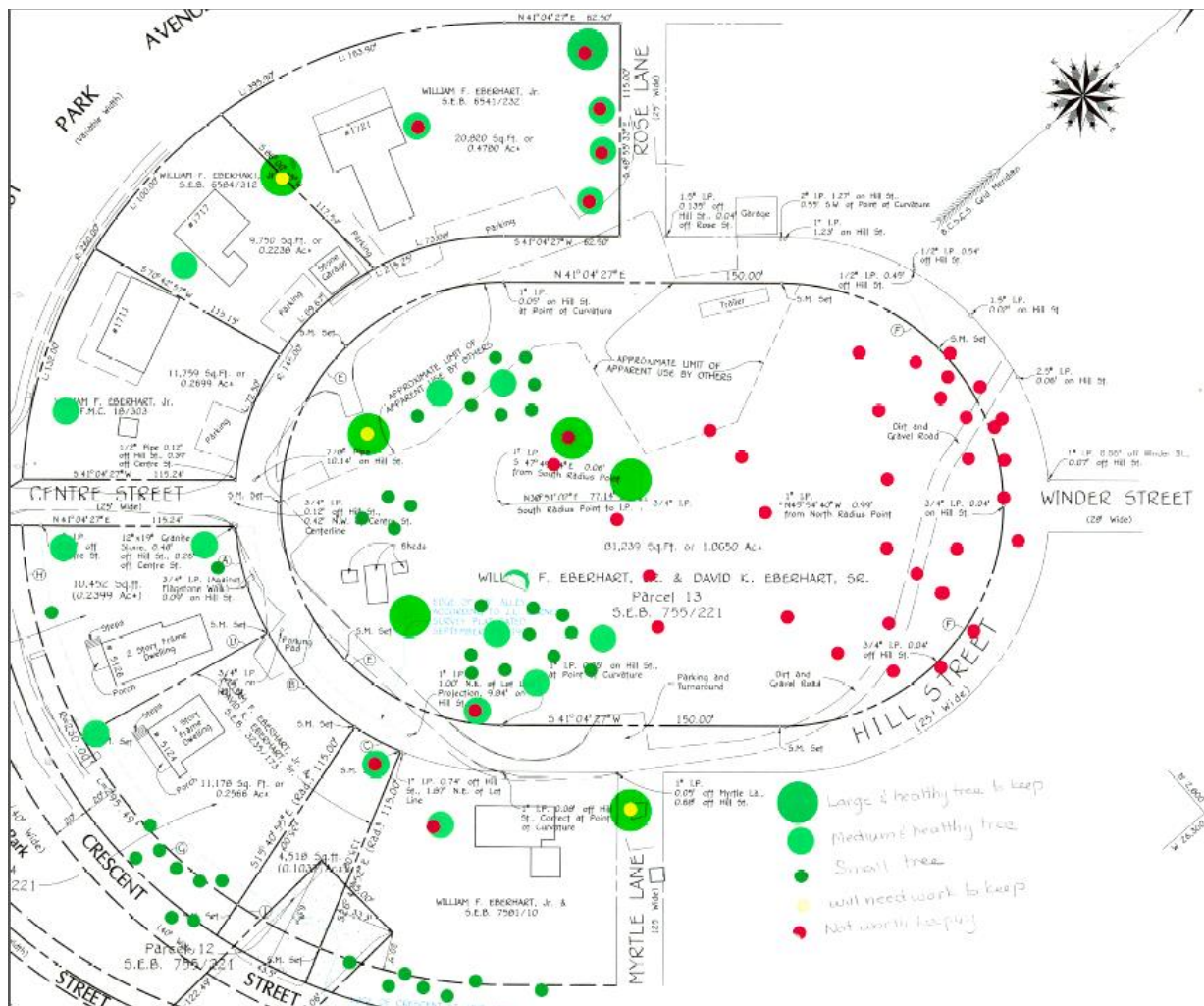


Image 16: Tree Study, Hill Street/Freeman's Oval, Randy Bernstein of Arbor Master, March 2017